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Testimony Concerning:

**Raised HB-5279 AN ACT ELIMINATING THE MINIMUM FAIR WAGE EXCEPTION FOR CERTAIN CITIZENS OF CONNECTICUT**

My name is Bob Cloonan and I am the parent of Anne Cloonan who is disabled. Anne has been successfully employed in a HARC, Inc. Supported Employment position for 17 years. With the assistance of many, Anne lives in her own apartment and takes the bus to and from downtown Hartford where she works 4 hours a day, 5 days a week in a HARC Supported Employment Work Site for the Reid and Riege Law Firm. Anne constantly reminds me of her success as she remarks: "Dad, I am so lucky to have such a wonderful job with my Reid & Riege family and my HARC co-workers. And when I ask her how her week has been the reply is always the same: "Dad, it was a great!"

In my opinion the Supported Employment worksites which HARC and other organizations have created do more for the disabled in Connecticut than anyone can possibly imagine. The concept is simple: Find jobs that are less complex, perhaps repetitive but necessary and important for a business organization. Next, create a worksite with perhaps two to five disabled workers and a supervisor to furnish those services. In Anne's case examples include, copying, sorting, mail room work, mail delivery, copying, delivery of faxes, conference room set-up and clean-up after meetings.

This concept creates tremendous independence, pride in accomplishment and the ability to contribute based on individual skill levels while building the self-esteem that everyone yearns for. More important it promotes growth and helps to change disabilities into abilities.

My concern is a practical one. Currently, the disabled have an exception from the Minimum Wage Requirement. This makes sense since -due to their more limited abilities - they often cannot be as competitive as a non-disabled worker. My understanding is that they are paid on a scale based on their work abilities that ranges from below the current Minimum Wage to a level that could exceed the minimum wage. The critical issue here is: **If we eliminate this disabilities exception, will we be jeopardizing hundreds of Supported Employment worksites operated by HARC and other organizations?** Will private Employers now be required to make up the difference?

If this is the case we could be eliminating jobs which we have worked too hard to create as well as a unique and creative employment relationship between the business community and the disabled community.

My recommendation is that the Minimum Wage exception for the disabled be maintained. It makes good sense in this instance.

Bob Cloonan - Parent of Anne Cloonan